

Legislative Priorities for January 2023

Background:

The Iowa Association of School Boards (IASB) each year asks each School Board it represents to provide to them with recommendations for including in IASB's political agenda and lobbying efforts.

Four years ago, we set the legislative priority asking lawmakers to approve the following:

✓ **Raise the maximum salary under IPERS from \$30,000 to \$50,000.**

Employees age 55 to 65 who return to work in an IPERS-covered position, are subject to an earnings limit. They are required to pay back a portion of their IPERS benefits if they earn more than \$30,000 a year. (The Iowa minimum teacher salary is \$33,500.) Moving up this cap could alleviate slightly the strain of the current teacher shortage.

We started this back in 2018 when no one was talking about it, and the idea was met with a great deal of skepticism. We included it in our priorities last summer.

This legislative session, it was signed into law exactly as we had written it and requested it for the last four years. I am sure no one but us remembers, but our idea finally gained traction and made it through to get the governor's signature.

We also had the priority:

✓ **Defeat vouchers.**

Again, our side was successful, but the opposition is intent on prevailing next session.

This year (2022), IASB held the following issues among its highest legislative priorities:

IASB's 2022 Legislative Priorities

DROPOUT/AT RISK

Supports the inclusion of dropout prevention and funding for at-risk students in the foundation formula and the inclusion of socio-economic status as a factor in determining a student's at-risk status. Supports allowing districts to request additional dropout prevention modified supplemental amount **up to the 5% maximum cap**. Opposes changes to the compulsory age of attendance unless sufficient funds are provided to implement strategies to retain those students.

MENTAL HEALTH

Supports efforts to establish comprehensive community mental health systems to offer preventative and treatment services and comprehensive school mental health programs that include:

- Increased access for in-school and telehealth services;
- Increased access to mental health professionals via in-person or telehealth visits;
- Creation of a categorical funding stream designated for mental health professionals serving students and ongoing teacher, administrator, and support staff mental health training;

- Ongoing teacher, administrator, and support staff training to improve the awareness and understanding of child emotional and mental health needs;
- Integration of suicide prevention and coping skills into existing curriculum;
- Expanding state-funded loan forgiveness programs to include mental health professionals who agree to provide services to schools;
- An ongoing mental health resources clearinghouse for schools and community providers; and
- Trainings that include a referral plan for continuing action provided by mental health professionals outside of the school district.

TEACHER RECRUITMENT & LICENSURE

Supports additional tools to attract individuals to the teaching profession, especially for teacher shortage areas including:

- Alternative teacher licensure upon completion of research-based teaching pedagogy training in addition to content knowledge in a curricular area;
- Pathways for individuals with non-traditional or international educational backgrounds to meet licensure qualifications;
- Reciprocity agreements with other states with high-quality education programs so as to increase diversity among our certified teachers and administrators;
- Expansion of programs such as: Teach Iowa Scholar, Troops to Teachers, Teacher Intern Program, and others as approved by the Board of Educational Examiners;
- Programs designed to recruit and retain teachers that will better match the demographic makeup of our student population; and
- Advocate for funding of loan forgiveness programs, grants, and stipends that will make education careers a more attractive and affordable option.

SCHOOL FUNDING POLICY

Supports a school foundation formula that:

- Provides sufficient and timely funding to meet education goals;
- **Equalizes per pupil funding for all program areas;**
- Equitably funds all Area Education Agencies;
- Provides a funding mechanism for transportation costs that reduces the pressure on the general fund and addresses inequities between school districts;
- Includes factors based on changes in demographics including socio-economic status, remedial programming, and enrollment challenges;
- Reflects actual costs for special education services;
- Incorporates categorical funding in the formula within three years; and
- Includes a mix of state aid and property taxes.

SUPPLEMENTAL STATE AID

Supports setting supplemental state aid:

- At a rate that sufficiently supports local districts' efforts to plan, create and sustain world-class schools;
- For FY 2023, by January 28, 2023; and
- For FY 2024 and future budget years, at least 14 months prior to the certification of the school's district budgets.
- Within the statutory requirements allows districts to make sound financial decisions on programs and staffing levels in order to provide the best possible education to all students.
- By a formula driven method for establishing the supplemental state aid growth rate if it is not set within the statutory requirements.
- That maintains an appropriate balance between using the state's general fund and property tax revenue.
- Districts should be given maximum flexibility to assign costs to the program.

Priorities for 2023

IASB is asking school board to identify up to four priority issues for possible inclusion among its 2023 legislative priorities. IASB asks boards to please reserve time during May, June, or July board meetings to discuss and complete the *Call for Legislative Priorities* survey. IASB asks our board secretary to complete and submit our priorities by Friday, August 5.

Last year, the Belmond-Klemme school board established its legislative priorities. They were

- ★ Funding and support for mental health services in Iowa schools and across the state.
- ★ Fund all schools on the same per-pupil amount.

Area Per-pupil Amounts are as Follows:

- | | |
|-----------|------------------------|
| ▪ \$7,372 | Lu Verne |
| ▪ \$7,367 | CAL |
| ▪ \$7,315 | Eagle Grove |
| ▪ \$7,253 | West Fork |
| ▪ \$7,232 | Clarion-Goldfield-Dows |
| ▪ \$7,227 | Belmond-Klemme |

- ★ Defeat vouchers.
- ★ Remove the arbitrary cap on Dropout/At-risk funds. Other school districts get 5% of their per-pupil budgets to spend on dropout prevention. Belmond-Klemme was arbitrarily capped at 4%.

Recommended Action:

I recommend the Board discuss this item with the intention of finalizing their choices during our July Board meeting.